

A NEW PUNIC INSCRIPTION FROM ŻEJTUN (MALTA) AND THE GODDESS ANAT-ASTARTE

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The inscription in question is incised on a pottery sherd (Figs. 1–2) which had been found in July 1976 during a seven-day excavation campaign at Żejtun conducted by Anthony Bonanno 'on behalf of the Museums Department as part of a Summer School Course organised by the National Students Travel Service (NSTS)' (Bonanno 1997).

The town of Żejtun is situated in the south-east of the island of Malta, and the aforementioned inscription was unearthed in an area which today lies in the grounds of the town's secondary school. The first signs of archaeological remains in the area appeared in 1961 when the operations for the building of the school had started; at that time some Roman pottery and stones had appeared, but it seems that nothing was done about this discovery. Further remains came to light in 1964, but it was only in 1971 that archaeological work started in earnest with the help of foreign volunteer students under the supervision of Tancred Gouder, then Curator of Archaeology at the Museums Department of Malta; the operation lasted for three consecutive summers. Thereafter, Anthony Bonanno continued to supervise the work in a small part of the area where the discoveries up to then had been made; he did this during the aforementioned seven-day campaign of 1976 (when the inscription which is the object of this study was found) and in 1977. No reports (not even preliminary ones) on any of the seasons of the archaeological work which was done at Żejtun have ever been published, except for Bonanno's recent report in the annual magazine of the girls' secondary school where the discoveries were made (Bonanno 1987). In this report Bonanno interpreted the archaeological discoveries made at Żejtun as the remains of a Roman villa which (in view of the Punic pottery found in the area) seems to have been preceded on the same spot by another villa which had been in use in Punic times during the last centuries before the Roman occupation of Malta in 218 B.C. (Bonanno 1987).

DISCOVERY AND CERAMIC DESCRIPTION OF THE INSCRIBED SHERD

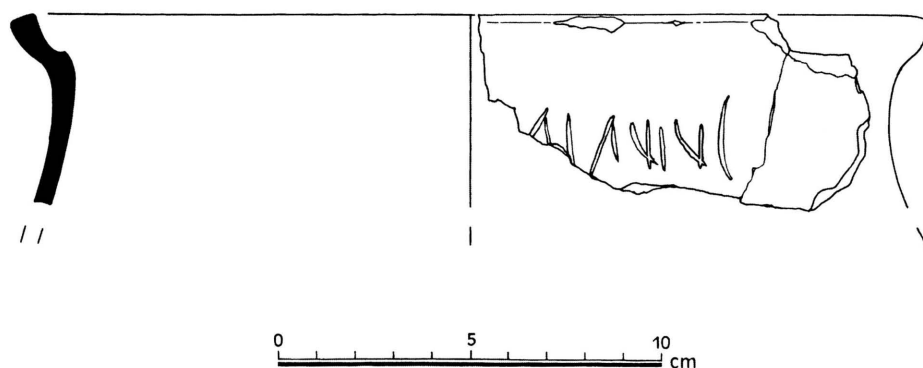
Since no published data were available about the find-spot of the inscription, the author asked Anthony Bonanno for more information about its stratigraphic background when it was handed over to him by the latter for study and publication. Bonanno told the author that

the sherd was found in Trench I, the northernmost of three trenches which had already been started by Dr Tancred Gouder, then Curator of Archaeology at the Museums Department, in previous years. It lay about 56 cm. below the surface level in association with abundant pottery sherds including some fragments of very coarse ware like that found the following year at Ħal Millieri. (Bonanno 1997)

Although this answer does not provide the stratigraphic layer in which the inscribed sherd was found, it is sufficient to show that the sherd was truly retrieved from an ancient site in Żejtun probably dating to the last few centuries before the Christian era. Yet, given the paucity of the data available, it is impossible to determine stratigraphically whether the building where the sherd was found dated to the late Punic period or to the Roman period, namely whether it had been in use some time before 218 B.C. or only some time after this date.



Fig. 1. The inscribed sherd from Żejtun.



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Fig. 2. Drawing of the inscribed sherd (*Nicholas Vella*).

The sherd seems to be the surviving part of a cooking pot 'since it showed evidence of burning on the outer surface and the shape of the rim was intended to receive a lid'; the inscription on it 'was incised before firing' (Bonanno 1997). The author agrees completely with this description which is further confirmed by the technical description of Claudia Sagona:

Rim sherd from a WM [wheel made] cooking pot with everted rim and inner lip (probably to take a lid). The fabric is coarse with a large amount of fine to large grits (in appearance like crushed limestone). The rim is blackened from use. The fabric has been evenly baked throughout and a thin wash, slightly darker than the surface, has been applied to the interior and exterior. Munsell [colour] of base fabric 2.5 YR 4/6, darker wash 2.5 YR 4/4. Dm of rim *c.* 23 cm., H of sherd 4.7 cm., L of sherd 10.1 cm.

Cooking vessels are rare in the *tombs* of Malta; the ware is likely to be imported to the island and finer vessels (cups, bowls etc) of a more refined but related ware suggest an origin in southern Italy. The style and ware type is [*sic*] found at Tas Silġ. (Sagona 1997)

Sagona ends her description with a note in square brackets: '[Examples can be seen at St Agatha's Museum]'.

Thus we are dealing with a sherd which originally formed part of a cooking pot which was probably imported from southern Italy, and similar examples of which can be seen in the aforementioned museum. Sagona writes nothing about the date of the sherd, though the author recalls that in a conversation with him she seems to have proposed some time in the second century B.C.

PALAEOGRAPHY

Anthony Bonanno had told the author that it looked as if the name of the goddess Astarte was incised on the sherd in Punic letters (cf. Bonanno 1987). Moreover, he had also written to the author that: 'On comparison with similar inscriptions recorded in *Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta* 1970, p. 89, pl. 59, 1 (Guzzo Amadasi) [= Guzzo Amadasi 1973, 89; Cagiano de Azevedo *et al.* 1973, pl. 59.1], the undersigned read the name Astarte. This was later confirmed by Dr Tancred Gouder, as well as Benedetto Rocco, while on a short visit on the island' (Bonanno 1997).

A quick look at the inscription shows that even if Astarte's name were actually inscribed on the sherd, it would not be the only incision on it. Indeed, it is very clear that the first letter of the inscription is the letter *lamed* (Figs. 1 and 3), very likely the preposition meaning 'to'. The inscription would then simply be read as a Punic dedicatory inscription meaning 'To Astarte', consisting of six Punic letters running from right to left, *l'strt*. When the author looked cursorily at the incised sherd for the first few times before attempting to find palaeographic parallels for it in the local repertoire of Punic inscriptions, he practically endorsed this reading.

However, after looking closely at the inscription, the author began to realize that there seemed to be a different name incised on the sherd and that Astarte's name was possibly only represented in an abbreviated form in the second part of the incised dedication. Indeed, the more he studied the letters of the inscription the more he was convinced that in reality it did not consist of six letters, but of seven (Figs. 1 and 3).

The first letter

The first letter seems to be a *lamed*. The earliest parallel to this *lamed* is possibly found in a Punic inscription dating to the second century B.C. (Peckham 1968, 184, pl. xv, row 8); there also seems to be a Neo-Punic parallel (Peckham 1968, 188, pl. xvii, row 3).

Good parallels for the *lamed* incised on the sherd from Żejtun can be found from Malta itself, namely on the inscriptions retrieved from the site of tas-Silġ which lies close to, but further south than, Żejtun and overlooks the bay of Marsaxlokk. Indeed, similar forms of this letter can be found (Cagiano de Azevedo *et al.* 1965, pl. 37.1; 1972, pl. 34.5) as well as variants of the *lamed*'s downward stroke (Cagiano de Azevedo *et al.* 1965, pl. 37.7; 1972, pl. 34.7). Such variant forms of the *lamed* from the site of tas-Silġ seem to date to the second/first century B.C. (Guzzo Amadasi 1972, 122).

The second letter

The second letter looks like an *'ayin*. There are parallels to the form of this letter ranging from the end of the fourth century to the second century B.C. Cyprus has yielded a parallel dating to the end of the fourth century B.C. (Peckham 1968, 8, pl. ii, row 8), while Malta has provided a



Fig. 3. Closer view of the inscription.

similar example dating from the third/second century B.C. (Garbini 1981, 59, column 2). However, the best parallel to the *'ayin* on the sherd from Żejtun can be found on a Punic inscription dating to the second century B.C. (Peckham 1968, 184, pl. xv, row 1) which clearly shows an *'ayin* which is open and which has an angular rather than a round bottom.

The third letter

This letter seems to be a *nūn*. There is a Neo-Punic example which looks similar to the type found on the inscription from Żejtun (Peckham 1968, 188, pl. xvii, row 2).

Once again, the site of tas-Silġ has provided a good parallel; there is one instance where a *nūn* from tas-Silġ is similar to the one from Żejtun (Bonello *et al.* 1964, pl. 29.2). It should be pointed out that this is a very schematized form of *nūn* which has been practically reduced to a stroke which though slightly oblique is basically vertical, and which can at times be confused with certain instances of the *lamed* or the *resh* found on the inscriptions of tas-Silġ (Garbini 1964, 89).

The fourth letter

This is an *'ayin* similar to the second letter. Both these *'ayins* are V-shaped, and the only difference is that the second one has a sharper angle at the bottom.

The problem of the 'ayin and the shin

The earlier reading of the inscription, which saw there the unabbreviated form of Astarte's name, took the third (*nūn*) and fourth (*'ayin*) letters (Fig. 4) as a single third letter, namely a *shin*. But if the third letter had been a *shin*, all its three downward strokes would have been linked



Fig. 4. Close-up of the third and fourth letters of the inscription.

together, just as the comparative evidence from tas-Silġ indicates (Cagiano de Azevedo *et al.* 1966, pl. 39.3; Bonello *et al.* 1964, pl. 27.4; cf. the drawings of the various types of the letter in Garbini 1965, 82).

The fifth letter

This letter can be easily read as a *taw*, despite the fact that the lower tip of the left bar is slightly broken off. A *taw* of a similar shape and stance in cursive script can be found on a papyrus dating to the beginning of the third century B.C. (Peckham 1968, 112, pl. XI, row 6). The same type of letter can be found in Neo-Punic (Peckham 1968, 188, xvii, row 3). Moreover, good local parallels are evidenced on the inscriptions from tas-Silġ (Garbini 1965, 82).

The sixth letter

This letter is made up of an oblique stroke (the stance being from left to right) which is broken off towards the bottom end, and it is not easy to decipher. However, the evidence from tas-Silġ indicates that it could be read as a *lamed*, which is obviously of a different type from the one discussed above (Bonello *et al.* 1964, pl. 29.2; cf. pls. 27, 28); the *lamed* 'appare ridotto a un semplice tratto verticale, più o meno obliquo, talvolta un pó più alto degli altri segni' and the fact that it is incised in a simplified shape (when compared to the usual type of Punic script) should simply be viewed as a particular type of Punic palaeography rather than as an instance of Neo-Punic writing (Garbini 1964, 88). Yet, it should also be pointed out that this schematic form of the *lamed* can be easily confused with similar letters representing the *nun* and the *resh* (Garbini 1964, 89).

The seventh letter

This letter is the last one on the sherd, and a very close look at the broken area to its left indicates that it was indeed meant to be the last letter; there is enough space in this area for the signs of a subsequent letter to have shown up. But there is absolutely no evidence at all of any traces of such letters.

The seventh letter is largely missing, but there is enough left of it to allow one to conclude that it is probably a *taw* quite similar to the fifth letter discussed above. Obviously, in view of the incomplete nature of the evidence, such a conclusion is tentative.

General conclusions

In view of all the foregoing points, there are three possible ways of reading the inscription on the incised sherd from Žejtun, namely: (a) *l'n't + lt*; (b) *l'n't + nt*; (c) *l'n't + rt*. The first five letters do not constitute any problem, and as will be shown below they are best translated 'to Anat'. But on the basis of the aforementioned evidence the last two do, firstly because the sixth letter can be read as a *lamed*, a *nūn*, or even a *resh*, and secondly because the reading of the last letter as a *taw* is not absolutely certain, although it does seem to be the most plausible one. In view of this, it will be argued that the last two letters can be translated in one of the following ways: (a) to Tin(n)it; (b) Tin(n)it; (c) Astarte. There are therefore the following possible translations of the inscription (discussed below):

- (a) to Anat, to Tin(n)it (b) to Anat-Tin(n)it (c) to Anat-Astarte

On the basis of all the palaeographic observations made thus far, it seems that this is a Punic inscription dating to some time in the second century B.C. It is interesting to note that this date tallies with the aforementioned ceramic date of the sherd.

PHILOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

The common element in the three possible translations mentioned above is found in the first five letters of the inscription, namely *l'n't*, which mean 'to Anat'.

The *lamed* is the common Semitic preposition meaning 'to', and here it indicates that we are dealing with a votive/dedicatory inscription.

It is a commonplace that the name of the goddess Anat is generally written *'nt* in unvocalized texts. However, in the inscription from Žejtun there is a second *'ayin* placed between the *nūn* and the *taw*. What is the function of this second *'ayin*? It seems that it is used as a *mater lectionis* to help the reader pronounce the consonantal text. It is known that in both Punic and Neo-Punic the *'ayin* (like the letter *aleph*) was used as a vowel letter. Both these letters 'may represent any vowel', but more often the *aleph* stands for the vowels *o* and *e*, whereas *'ayin* is used for the vowel *a* (Harris 1936, 18); indeed, in Neo-Punic the use of *alef* and *'ayin* as vowel letters becomes widespread, and 'the distinction between the two has become quite definite' (Harris 1936, 19).

Thus in Punic the word *qbr*, the original pronunciation of which seems to have been **qabr*, is also found in a variant form, namely *qb'r* where the *'ayin* stands for the vowel letter *a* which is here functioning as an anaptyctic vowel (Harris 1936, 34). Another example where the *'ayin* is used as a vowel letter in Punic can be found in the word *b'rk'* which is a variant of *brk'*; in the former case, the *'ayin* 'represents the *a* vowel of the first syllable' of this verb (in the Piel form) which is a masculine and feminine singular in the imperative mood followed by a suffix (Harris 1936, 41). In Neo-Punic the word *'sr* is also found as *'s'r*, where the second *'ayin* is once again being used as a vowel letter (Harris 1936, 22). Finally, it should be pointed out that the same phenomenon occurs in personal names; thus, the proper name *mtnb'l* is found in Neo-Punic in a variant form, namely *m't'nb'l* where the two *'ayins* in *mtn* are used as vowel letters indicating that the whole name was most probably pronounced *Matanba'al* (Harris 1936, 109).

What about the three possible different ways of reading the last two letters of the inscription from Žejtun? As already pointed out, the basic problem lies with the fact that the palaeographic reading of these letters is not that certain. Moreover since the inscription does not really have a context, it is very difficult to choose one of the three possibilities, each of which in fact seems to make sense. However, as will be shown below, no matter which of the three possibilities one chooses, the basic overall meaning of the inscription remains the same.

The first option mentioned above allows one to read the last two letters of the inscription as *lt*. In this case, the letter *lamed* is analysed as the preposition 'to', whereas the letter *t* is seen as an abbreviation of the name of the goddess of fertility Tin(n)it. Hence, the translation of *lt* would be 'to Tin(n)it'. This goddess is generally known as Tanit, but strictly speaking her name, which appears as *tnt* in unvocalized texts, should be rendered 'Tin(n)it' when vocalized (Gordon 1987, 23). The author has already shown elsewhere that there is evidence from the site of tas-Silġ which indicates that the letter *taw* can be used as an abbreviation for the name of the goddess Tin(n)it (Frendo 1996, 1128–31 and references there). Thus the letters *lt* would provide another example of the letter *taw* being used as an abbreviation of Tin(n)it's name, and in this case the inscription from Žejtun would mean 'to Anat, to Tin(n)it'. As will be shown in the commentary below, although strictly speaking such a translation is possible, it does run into some difficulties from the general philological point of view.

The second option listed above allows one to read the last two letters of the inscription as *nt* which, however, does not seem to make sense. Yet it could very well be the case that the last letter in Anat's name, namely *taw*, is also acting as the first letter of the following word and thereby functioning as a double-duty letter. The seven letters of the inscription would actually stand for eight letters distributed thus, namely:

$$l'n'tnt = l'n't + tnt$$

In this case, the inscription will have to be translated 'to Anat-Tin(n)it', which (as will be shown below) makes good sense. Such double-duty letters, which are known in North-West Semitic, should not be confused with instances of haplography which occur when texts are copied. Indeed, haplography refers 'to the inadvertent failure to write a letter(s) or word(s) that should appear in the text. In its simplest form, haplography is the copying once of a letter that was written twice in the text from which the scribe copied' (Brotzman 1994, 113). On the other hand, the type of double-duty letter like the one under consideration here, seems to be a case of haplogy which is 'the tendency to avoid two similar sounds (. . .) or syllables next to one another' (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, 170 n.14) or which can be described as a construction wherein 'two identical neighboring items are reduced to one' (*ibid.*, 106). Strictly speaking, haplography is a 'scribal process', whereas haplogy is a 'phonological' one and the two processes should not be confused 'though they may have the same effect in a written text' (*ibid.*, 170 n.14). There are various examples of double-duty letters in north-west Semitic. Some of those which occur in biblical Hebrew could be interpreted as cases of haplography rather than haplogy (*ibid.*, 170 and references there), but when it comes to epigraphic evidence it seems that we are generally dealing with unambiguous cases of double-duty letters which are in fact instances of haplogy. Thus, for example, the detection by P.-E. Dion of a double-duty *nūn* in the so-called seal of Hananyah seems to provide the most satisfactory analysis for this inscribed Ammonite artefact (Aufrecht 1989, 12).

Finally, the third choice listed above allows one to read the last two letters as *nt*. Even in this case, as in the preceding example, it is highly probable that there is an instance of haplogy with the *taw* (the last letter in Anat's name) functioning as a double-duty letter. Then the seven letters of the inscription actually stand for the following eight letters distributed thus:

$$l'n^{\epsilon}trt = l'n^{\epsilon}t + trt$$

In this case, the letters *trt* function as an abbreviation of the name of Astarte, the well-known Semitic goddess of fertility, and the whole inscription can be translated 'to Anat-Astarte'. In fact, the letters *trt* are often used as an abbreviation of Astarte's name (Benz 1972, 237). In theory, one could argue that the letters *rt* on their own can stand as an abbreviation for the name of the deity Melqart (cf. *ibid.*) and that therefore one need not invoke the principle of haplology in the case of the letter *t* found between the second 'ayin and the *resh*. However, it should be pointed out that the letters *qrt* are the ones generally used as an abbreviation for Melqart's name (Harris 1936, 144) and that (as shown below) the composite deity Anat-Astarte fits very well indeed in the context of West Semitic religion whereas Anat-Melqart does not. In view of all this, it seems better to retain the analysis just mentioned and to suggest a third possible translation of the inscription, namely 'to Anat-Astarte', which (as will be shown below) seems to be the best solution.

THE GODDESS ANAT

Thus, the seven-letter inscription from Žejtun can in fact be translated in one of the following ways:

- (a) to Anat, to Tin(n)it (b) to Anat-Tin(n)it (c) to Anat-Astarte

It is clear that the common factor in the foregoing list is the name of the west Semitic goddess Anat (cf. Day 1995). She is associated with Baal (the West Semitic storm god) in the Ugaritic texts (Lipiński 1992, 28), where she is also presented as his sister in the sense of being his lover, or even his wife (De Moor 1987, 14 n.69, 109 n.4); indeed, she even makes a formal proposal of marriage to him (De Moor 1987, 242 n.128 and references therein). Her close links with Baal (who as a storm god gave fertility to the earth) help explain why she too was viewed as a contributor to the earth's fertility (Ferjaoui 1992, 379–80).

During the first millennium B.C. it was the fertility goddess Astarte (who in the preceding millennium had played a rather secondary role in the mythology of Ugarit) who became very popular in the Levant (Garbini 1981, 32). Indeed, at this time 'in Phoenicia and Palestine Astarte grew in importance, while Anath became hidden under various other appellations' (Albright 1968, 115). Often this is simply a question of names, for the Ugaritic texts already indicate that Anat and Astarte are very closely linked. Sometimes they are portrayed as a pair of goddesses (De Moor 1987, 30, 33, 168, 170); at other times, however, they seem to be identified. Thus, for example, in Baal 2.i.40 we read:

[Anat] took [his right hand]
Athtart took his left hand, (saying) . . .

whereas in line 45 the answer given to Baal is rendered in the first person singular: 'I myself tell Yam your lord' (Gibson 1978, 42, 43), thereby showing that in this context Anat and Astarte are viewed as one composite entity.

The fact that Astarte's name was the more popular one in the Levant during the first millennium B.C. does not mean that Anat was no longer known there and elsewhere in the Mediterranean region during this time. Thus, for example, in the Achaemenid period she was known at Elephantine (Ferjaoui 1992, 380 and references there), where the fifth-century B.C. Aramaic papyri show that there was a composite deity called Anatbethel and another one named Anatya'u, the latter being a type of consort of Ya'u (Cowley 1923, xviii, 76, 147–48).

Phoenician and Punic inscriptions give further evidence (albeit rarely) of Anat's name during the first millennium B.C. Four Phoenician inscriptions from Cyprus mention her; three of them come from Idalion, and one from Lapethos (Garbini 1994, 42 n.54 and references there). The latter inscription is a bilingual one (in Phoenician and Greek) dating to the fourth century B.C., and in it one can find the Phoenician words *ʾnt mʾz hym* (= 'to Anat, force of life') which are rendered in Greek as Ἀθηνᾶ Σωτήριαν Νίκην (Ribichini 1995, 10 and references there) meaning 'to Athena, victorious saviour'. The identification of Anat with Athena can also be seen in the aforementioned inscriptions from Idalion, for out of the three Phoenician inscriptions there, two come from Athena's sanctuary (Ribichini 1995, 10 and references therein).

As far as Punic epigraphy goes, Anat's name appears only in theophoric anthroponyms found at Carthage and Hadrumetum (Benz 1972, 382). Thus the name *ʾbdʾnt* is found five times in Punic inscriptions from Carthage (Ferjaoui 1992, 314), but in no Punic inscription unearthed so far has Anat's name been used as the addressee of a dedication; the only exception seems to be the inscription from Žejtun discussed here.

How can this dearth of evidence for Anat's name in Phoenician-Punic epigraphy be accounted for? It seems that during the first millennium B.C. only three female deities are mentioned in Phoenician inscriptions, namely Astarte, Isis, and Anat. The name of the goddess Astarte is often found, whilst that of Isis is encountered only at Memphis in Egypt and perhaps also at Grotta Regina near Palermo in Sicily. As has already been pointed out, Anat too is very rarely mentioned. It seems that during the first millennium B.C. it was difficult for a Phoenician goddess to be called other than by the name of Astarte, whose name is mentioned without any appellative in inscriptions retrieved in Tyre, Sidon, Ur, Kition, Lapethos, Memphis, Malta, Carthage, Motya, and Pyrgi (Garbini 1994, 41–42). This state of affairs was already known to William Robertson Smith towards the end of the last century, and that is why he had stated that Astarte 'is evidently a goddess of the most generalized type and so might be identified by a Greek with almost any one of his own goddesses according to the particular aspect of her multiform character in which she happened to be presented to him'; indeed, he added that 'all the Semitic goddesses are of this highly generalized type' (Smith 1995, 90 and references therein). The pattern found in Phoenician inscriptions is equally applicable to Punic epigraphy.

COMMENTARY

Thus the inscription from Žejtun is one of the very rare instances when Anat's name is found in the Phoenician-Punic epigraphy of the first millennium B.C., and it has the traditional formula typical of North-West Semitic dedicatory inscriptions. The latter consist of the name of a deity, either alone or preceded by the preposition *lamed* meaning 'to'. Thus, for example, the letters *lyh* meaning 'to Yah' are incised on the outside of the rim of a bowl from Samaria dating to around the beginning of the eighth century B.C. (Renz 1995a, 109–110), whilst the letters *ʾl* literally meaning 'El/god' are incised on the bottom of a bowl from Khirbet el-Qom dating to the end of the same century. However, since in the latter case the bowl is a libation vessel, the incised letters actually constitute a dedicatory inscription which is better translated as 'to El/god' (Renz 1995a, 215). In these and similar cases the dedicatory formula indicates the deity to whom a vessel was offered (Renz 1995b, 26).

The three possible translations of the dedicatory inscription from Žejtun which were mentioned above show that the name of the goddess Anat is not the only one found on this inscription. According to the first translation, the inscription reads 'to Anat, to Tin(n)it'. The fact that the preposition *lamed* is written twice, namely before Anat's as well as Tin(n)it's name,

does not present any problem from the general philological point of view. This phenomenon is known from other Punic inscriptions (Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995, 555 and references there). However, it should also be pointed out that such a construction is actually used when the first word to which the *lamed* is attached is describing or qualifying the one following it. Thus, we find *l'dnn lmlqrt* meaning 'to our lord, to Melqart', and *lrbt lnt* meaning 'to the lady, to Tin(n)it' (Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995, *ibid.*). The same pattern is found on a bronze bowl on which there is a Phoenician dedicatory inscription dating to the fifth century B.C. at the latest (Deutsch and Heltzer 1994, 69, 72). However, when two deities are referred to, then a conjunctive *waw* is placed before the *lamed* preceding the name of the second god or goddess, as shown by the words of a Punic inscription, namely *lrbt lnt pn b'l wl'dn lb'l hmn* meaning 'to the lady, to Tin(n)it, the face of Baal, and to the lord, to Baal Hammon' (Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995, *ibid.*).

Thus, if the personal names of Anat and Tin(n)it were both meant to be referred to in the inscription from Žejtun, then one would expect to find the conjunction *waw* before the *lamed* preceding Tin(n)it's name. On the other hand, had a composite deity, namely Anat-Tin(n)it, been intended, then there would be no need for the *lamed* or the *waw* to be placed before the second part of the composite name. Such, for example, is the case with the famous inscription *lnt šrt* from Sarepta (Pritchard 1978, fig. 103; 1988, 7–8, fig. 1.1) Therefore, the only way in which the translation 'to Anat, to Tin(n)it' would make sense is if the word Anat were not really being used as a proper name but as a general term with some such meaning as, for example, goddess. However, there does not seem to be any evidence for this, and therefore the translation 'To Anat, to Tin(n)it' is best discarded.

The second aforementioned translation, namely 'to Anat-Tin(n)it' makes good sense. In this case, we would be dealing with a composite deity, namely the conflation of the two goddesses Anat and Tin(n)it. The observations made in the foregoing paragraph as well as those pointed out above in the philological commentary fully support this translation.

However, given the above-mentioned palaeographic ambiguity, there is another translation of the Žejtun inscription which is possible and which seems to make even better sense, namely 'to Anat-Astarte'. In this case, we would once again be dealing with a composite deity. This time there is the conflation of the goddesses Anat and Astarte. The observations made above on the nature of the goddess Anat and her close relationship (indeed sometimes even identity) with Astarte fully corroborate this translation. Moreover, other pieces of evidence of a variegated nature seem to strengthen this conclusion. Thus, the Late Bronze Age as well as the Iron Age iconography of the Levant shows Anat in her role as a warrior goddess riding a horse, or being represented by the latter in a non-anthropomorphic manner (Keel and Uehlinger 1992, 158, 161, fig. 163b). Such a close link with the horse seems to be equally valid for Astarte (*ibid.*, 181). In addition, Anat and Astarte were both viewed by the ancient Egyptians as the bride of Seth (Ferjaoui 1992, 375 and references there). Finally, the famous inscribed arrowheads from el-Khader, near Bethlehem, furnish further evidence for the very close relationship between the goddesses Anat and Astarte. On one of these arrowheads we read about *bdlb't bn 'nt*, literally meaning 'the servant of the lioness, the son of Anat'. It seems better to translate *lb't* by 'lioness' rather than by the customary Lion-Lady, thereby underscoring Anat's aggressive character rather than implying that she is the mistress of lions (Keel and Uehlinger, 1992, 146, n.84). In Akkadian, the term 'lioness' is applied to the goddess Ishtar, who is generally viewed as the equivalent of the West Semitic Astarte (*ibid.*, 144, 145, fig. 156 and references there). Hence, in this instance the West Semites must have viewed Anat as being very similar to or indeed identical with Astarte.

In view of the foregoing observations, it seems that of the three possible translations of the inscription the first is the least likely. We are therefore left with two readings, namely 'to

Anat-Tin(n)it' and 'to Anat-Astarte'. The author prefers the latter translation for the simple reason that (as was shown above) there is a substantial amount of evidence to underpin the close link (at times even identity) between the goddesses Anat and Astarte, whereas such evidence does not seem to be available for Anat and Tin(n)it.

This inscription provides another instance of the otherwise very rare occurrence of Anat's name in the Phoenician-Punic epigraphy of the first millennium B.C., showing that Anat was still worshipped during the second century B.C. in Malta and that she was probably being venerated as the composite west Semitic deity Anat-Astarte. The latter conclusion cannot be absolutely definite because of the palaeographic uncertainty of the last two letters of the inscription. But the suggested solutions for these letters are highly probable, and therefore the inscription also seems to lend strong support to William Robertson Smith's proposal of a century ago that Anat is 'essentially' equal to Astarte (Smith 1995, 90, n.23 and references there).

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